

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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SUBJ: PRESIDENT CLOSES CONGRESS; ANNOUNCES END OF STATE OF SIEGE

1. IN A SPEECH DEC. 16 CLOSING THE 1975 ORDINARY SESSION OF CONGRESS, PRESIDENT LOPEZ ANNOUNCED THAT THE STATE OF SIEGE WOULD BE LIFTED WITHIN THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS. THE LIFTING OF THE STATE OF SIEGE, HE SAID, WOULD ALLOW THE HOLDING OF THE MID-TERM (APRIL 1976) ELECTIONS IN A NORMAL FASHION. HE CLAIMED THAT THE FIGHT AGAINST CRIME, PARTICULARLY AGAINST DRUGS, KIDNAPPING AND EXTORTION HAD BEEN HIGHLY SATISFACTORY. AS HE HAS DONE PREVIOUSLY, HE DEFENDED THE NECESSITY OF IMPOSING THE STATE OF SIEGE LAST JUNE, CITING THE MAGNITUDE OF VIOLENCE WHICH INCLUDED THE KILLING OF A GENERAL AND ATTACKS AGAINST EXTREME LEFTIST PUBLICATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS.

2. LOPEZ PRAISED THE "HONEYMOON" THAT EXISTED BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CONGRESS DURING THE YEAR, WHICH, HE SAID, PERMITTED THE PASSAGE OF A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF IMPORTANT BILLS. AMONG THESE HE LISTED THE 1976 BUDGET, WHICH HAS AS ITS PRIMARY OBJECTIVE A CONSIDERABLE INCREASE IN ASSISTANCE TO THE 50 PERCENT OF POOREST COLOMBIANS. HE ALSO CITED THE TAX RELIEF BILL, THE COLOMBIANIZATION OF FOREIGN BANKS, THE BILL ALLOWING DIVORCE IN THE

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CASE OF CIVIL MARRIAGE, THE CENTRALIZATION OF PRIMARY AND SECON-

DARY EDUCATION AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFOR PERMITTING 18-YEAR OLDS TO VOTE AS MAJOR PIECES OF DOMESTIC LEGISLATION. IN THE FIELD OF INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION HE CITED CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL OF THE TREATY DELIMITING MARITIME LIMITS BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND ECUADOR, THE WORLD COFFEE AGREEMENT AND APPROVAL OF A BILATERAL AGREEMENT FORMALIZING SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE USSR AND COLOMBIAN (SIGNED IN 1970) AS MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS.

3. HE LAMENTED THE INABILITY OF THE CONGRESS TO ESTABLISH THE PLANNING COMMISSION WHICH ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTION HAS RESPONSIBILITY FOR REVIEWING ALL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMS OF THE GOVERNMENT. NOTING THAT CONGRESS HAS BEEN UNABLE SINCE THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT OF 1968 TO ESTABLISH THE COMMISSION, THE PRESIDENT PROPOSED THE CONGRESS CONSIDER ANOTHER CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT WHICH WOULD MAKE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMISSION MORE FEASIBLE.

4. THE PRESIDENT LAMENTED THE FACT THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO KEEP HIS ELECTION PROMISE OF APPOINTING A CONSERVATIVE AS COMPTROLLER GENERAL. NEVERTHELESS, HE SAID, THE DISPLAY OF AUTONOMY BY THE CONGRESS IN NAMING A LIBERAL PROVED THE STRENGTH OF THE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS.

5. FINALLY, THE PRESIDENT DISCUSSED THE EXISTING DEPARTMENTAL GOVERNMENTS. HE DESCRIBED DEPARTMENTAL ASSEMBLIES AS OUTMODED INSTITUTIONS DEDICATED FOR THE MOST PART TO THE ELECTION OF THE FIRING OF DEPARTMENTAL OFFICIALS AND INCREASING PER DIEM FOR MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLIES. HE CLAIMED THAT THE EXISTENCE OF VARIOUS SECRETARIATS OF DEPARTMENTAL MINISTRIES IN LARGE MEASURE DUPLICATED THOSE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL AND WERE UNNECESSARY. REFERRING TO HIS NOVEMBER 1ST SPEECH IN MEDELLIN CONCERNING "INSTITUTIONALIZATION OR CATASTROPHE" (BOGOTA 10750), THE PRESIDENT DENOUNCED AS HIGH LEVEL EXTORTION THE ACTIONS OF THE CHOCO ASSEMBLY WHICH RECENTLY ATTEMPTED TO PASS A RESOLUTION ANNEXING THAT TERRITORY TO PANAMA. HE PROPOSED THEREFORE THAT CONGRESS CONSIDER AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION TO ELIMINATE DEPARTMENTAL ASSEMBLIES. HE PROPOSED THAT GOVERNORS BE ELECTED RATHER THAN APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT AND THAT THE GOVERNORS ACT AS COORDINATORS OF PROGRAMS BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENTS AND THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.

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6. COMMENT: THE PRESIDENT WAS RELUCTANT TO IMPOSE THE STATE OF SIEGE IN THE FIRST PLACE, AND BY LIFTING IT NOW HE FOLLOWS THE LEAD OF FORMER PRESIDENT PASTRANA WHO CANCELLED THE STATE OF SIEGE IN DECEMBER 1973 IN PREPARATION FOR THE APRIL 1974 ELECTIONS. NOW, AS THEN, SECURITY CONDITIONS HAVE NOT IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY. AS FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PRAISE OF THE CONGRESS, IT SEEMS DESERVED. A LONG-TIME CONGRESSMAN TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT THIS WAS THE

MOST SERIOUS CONGRESS IN THE LAST 16 YEARS AS EVIDENCED BY THE LOW
LEVEL OF ABSENTEEISM AND SERIOUS ANALYSIS OF ISSUES THE PRESI-
DENT'S TRIAL BALLOON TO ELIMINATE DEPARTMENTAL ASSEMBLIES MAY NOT
GET OFF THE GROUND. THE POWER BASE OF MANY COLOMBIAN POLITICI-
ANS LIES IN THEIR ABILITY TO GET SUPPORTERS ELECTED TO THE ASSEM-
BLIES AND FOR THESE ASSEMBLYMEN IN TURN TO INFLUENCE THE APPOINT-
MENT OF DEPARTMENTAL OFFICIALS. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT POLITICIANS
WOULD GIVE UP THIS PREROGATIVE VERY EASILY. SINCE THE PRESIDENT
SAID THAT HE DID NOT PLAN TO CALL A SPECIAL SESSION, THE CONGRESS
WILL NOT RECONVENE UNTIL JULY 20, 1976.
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